Strauss's Response to Voegelin's Review

RESTATEMENT ON XENOPHON'S *HIERO*

A social science that cannot speak of tyranny with the same confidence with which medicine speaks, for example, of cancer, cannot understand social phenomena as what they are. It is therefore not scientific. Present-day social science finds itself in this condition. If it is true that present-day social science is the inevitable result of modern social science and of modern philosophy, one is forced to think of the restoration of classical social science. Once we have learned again from the classics what tyranny is, we shall be enabled and compelled to diagnose as tyrannies a number of contemporary regimes which appear in the guise of dictatorships. This diagnosis can only be the first step toward an exact analysis of present-day tyranny, for present-day tyranny is fundamentally different from the tyranny analyzed by the classics.

But is this not tantamount to admitting that the classics were wholly unfamiliar with tyranny in its contemporary form? Must one not therefore conclude that the classical concept of tyranny is too narrow and hence that

Excerpted from Leo Strauss, "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*." See note 49 to Letter 21.

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mass-man is seen as incapable of self-government, and as making the new type of ruler historically necessary.

This book, finally, is a noteworthy contribution to the systematic problems of political theory. Every political scientist who tries to disentangle himself from the contemporary confusion over the problems of tyranny will be much indebted to this study and inevitably use it as a starting point.

The book is preceded by a charming foreword from the pen of Alvin Johnson. The distinguished scholar and educator stresses the affinities between Xenophon and America. Like an American, Xenophon "failed to see the things that aren't there. And, indeed, as a wide-awake young fellow, Xenophon managed to get into the presence of Socrates, but got little that was Socratic out of his encounters." Instead, he was gallant and resourceful. He speculated on true happiness, "but no more than an American did he break his head on it. He wanted pragmatic answers, not nebulous ultimacies."

—Eric Voegelin

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the classical frame of reference must be radically modified, i.e., abandoned? In other words, is the attempt to restore classical social science not utopian, since it implies that the classical orientation has not been made obsolete by the triumph of the biblical orientation?

This seems to be the chief objection to which my study of Xenophon's *Hiero* is exposed. At any rate, this is the gist of the only criticisms of my study from which one could learn anything. Those criticisms were written in complete independence of each other, and their authors, Professor Eric Voegelin and M. Alexandre Kojève, have, so to speak, nothing in common. Before discussing their arguments, I must restate my contention.

The fact that there is a fundamental difference between classical tyranny and present-day tyranny, or that the classics did not even dream of present-day tyranny, is not a good or sufficient reason for abandoning the classical frame of reference. For that fact is perfectly compatible with the possibility that present-day tyranny finds its place within the classical framework, i.e., that it cannot be understood adequately except within the classical framework. The difference between present-day tyranny and classical tyranny has its root in the difference between the modern notion of philosophy or science and the classical notion of philosophy or science. Present-day tyranny, in contradistinction to classical tyranny, is based on the unlimited progress in the "conquest of nature" which is made possible by modern science, as well as on the popularization or diffusion of philosophic or scientific knowledge. Both possibilities—the possibility of a science that issues in the conquest of nature and the possibility of the popularization of philosophy or science—were known to the classics. (Compare Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I.1.15 with Empedocles, fr. III; Plato, *Theaetetus* 180 c 7–d 5.) But the classics rejected them as "unnatural," i.e., as destructive of humanity. They did not dream of present-day tyranny because they regarded its basic presuppositions as so preposterous that they turned their imagination in entirely different directions.

Voegelin, one of the leading contemporary historians of political thought, seems to contend (*The Review of Politics*, 1949, pp. 241–44) that the classical concept of tyranny is too narrow because it does not cover the phenomenon known as Caesarism: when calling a given regime tyrannical, we imply that "constitutional" government is a viable alternative to it; but Caesarism emerges only after "the final breakdown of the republican constitutional order"; hence, Caesarism or "post-constitutional" rule cannot be understood as a subdivision of tyranny in the classical sense of tyranny. There is no reason to quarrel with the view that genuine

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Caesarism is not tyranny, but this does not justify the conclusion that Caesarism is incomprehensible on the basis of classical political philosophy: Caesarism is still a subdivision of absolute monarchy as the classics understood it. If in a given situation "the republican constitutional order" has completely broken down, and there is no reasonable prospect of its restoration within all the foreseeable future, the establishment of permanent absolute rule cannot, as such, be justly blamed; therefore, it is fundamentally different from the establishment of tyranny. Just blame could attach only to the manner in which that permanent absolute rule that is truly necessary is established and exercised; as Voegelin emphasizes, there are tyrannical as well as royal Caesars. One has only to read Coluccio Salutati's defense of Caesar against the charge that he was a tyrant—a defense which in all essential points is conceived in the spirit of the classics—in order to see that the distinction between Caesarism and tyranny fits perfectly into the classical framework.

But the phenomenon of Caesarism is one thing, the current concept of Caesarism is another. The current concept of Caesarism is certainly incompatible with classical principles. The question thus arises whether the current concept or the classical concept is more nearly adequate. More particularly, the question concerns the validity of the two implications of the current concept which Voegelin seems to regard as indispensable, and which originated in nineteenth-century historicism. In the first place, he seems to believe that the difference between "the constitutional situation" and "the post-constitutional situation" is more fundamental than the difference between the good king or the good Caesar on the one hand and the bad king or the bad Caesar on the other. But is not the difference between good and bad the most fundamental of all practical or political distinctions? Secondly, Voegelin seems to believe that "post-constitutional" rule is not per se inferior to "constitutional" rule. But is not "post-constitutional" rule justified by necessity or, as Voegelin says, by "historical necessity"? And is not the necessary essentially inferior to the noble or to what is choiceworthy for its own sake? Necessity excuses: what is justified by necessity is in need of excuse. The Caesar, as Voegelin conceives of him, is "the avenger of the misdeeds of a corrupt people." Caesarism is then essentially related to a corrupt people, to a low level of political life, to a decline of society. It presupposes the decline, if not the extinction, of civic virtue or of public spirit, and it necessarily perpetuates that condition. Caesarism belongs to a degraded society, and it thrives on its degradation. Caesarism is just, whereas tyranny is unjust. But Caesarism is just in the way in which

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deserved punishment is just. It is as little choiceworthy for its own sake as is deserved punishment. Cato refused to see what his time demanded because he saw too clearly the degraded character of what his time demanded. It is much more important to realize the low level of Caesarism (for, to repeat, Caesarism cannot be divorced from the society which deserves Caesarism) than to realize that under certain conditions Caesarism is necessary and hence legitimate.

While the classics were perfectly capable of doing justice to the merits of Caesarism, they were not particularly concerned with elaborating a doctrine of Caesarism. Since they were primarily concerned with the best regime, they paid less attention to "post-constitutional" rule, or to late kingship, than to "pre-constitutional" rule, or to early kingship: rustic simplicity is a better soil for the good life than is sophisticated rottenness. But there was another reason which induced the classics to be almost silent about "post-constitutional" rule. To stress the fact that it is just to replace constitutional rule by absolute rule, if the common good requires that change, means to cast a doubt on the absolute sanctity of the established constitutional order. It means encouraging dangerous men to confuse the issue by bringing about a state of affairs in which the common good requires the establishment of their absolute rule. The true doctrine of the legitimacy of Caesarism is a dangerous doctrine. The true distinction between Caesarism and tyranny is too subtle for ordinary political use. It is better for the people to remain ignorant of that distinction and to regard the potential Caesar as a potential tyrant. No harm can come from this theoretical error which becomes a practical truth if the people have the mettle to act upon it. No harm can come from the political identification of Caesarism and tyranny: Caesars can take care of themselves.

The classics could easily have elaborated a doctrine of Caesarism or of late kingship if they had wanted, but they did not want to do it. Voegelin however contends that they were forced by their historical situation to grope for a doctrine of Caesarism, and that they failed to discover it. He tries to substantiate his contention by referring to Xenophon and to Plato. As for Plato, Voegelin was forced by considerations of space to limit himself to a summary reference to the royal ruler in the *Statesman*. As for Xenophon, he rightly asserts that it is not sufficient to oppose "the *Cyropaedia* as a mirror of the perfect king to the *Hiero* as a mirror of the tyrant," since the perfect king Cyrus and the improved tyrant who is described by Simonides "look much more opposed to each other than they really are." He explains this fact by suggesting that "both works fundamen-

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tally face the same historical problem of the new [sc., post-constitutional] rulership," and that one cannot solve this problem except by obliterating at the first stage, the distinction between king and tyrant. To justify this explanation he contends that "the very motivation of the *Cyropaedia* is the search for a stable rule that will make an end to the dreary overturning of democracies and tyrannies in the Hellenic polis." This contention is not supported by what Xenophon says or indicates in regard to the intention of the *Cyropaedia*. Its explicit intention is to make intelligible Cyrus's astonishing success in solving the problem of ruling human beings. Xenophon conceives of this problem as one that is coeval with man. Like Plato in the *Statesman*, he does not make the slightest reference to the particular "historical" problem of stable rule in "the post-constitutional situation." In particular, he does not refer to "the dreary overturning of democracies and tyrannies in the Hellenic polis": he speaks of the frequent overturning of democracies, monarchies, and oligarchies and of the essential instability of all tyrannies. As for the implicit intention of the *Cyropaedia*, it is partly revealed by the remark, toward the end of the work, that "after Cyrus died, his sons immediately quarreled, cities and nations immediately revolted, and all things turned to the worse." If Xenophon was not a fool, he did not intend to present Cyrus's regime as a model. He knew too well that the good order of society requires stability and continuity. (Compare the opening of the *Cyropaedia* with the parallel in the *Agesilaus* 1.4.) He rather used Cyrus's meteoric success and the way in which it was brought about as an example for making intelligible the nature of political things. The work which describes Cyrus's whole life is entitled *The Education of Cyrus*: the education of Cyrus is the clue to his whole life, to his astonishing success, and hence to Xenophon's intention. A very rough sketch must here suffice. Xenophon's Cyrus was the son of the king of Persia, and until he was about twelve years old he was educated according to the laws of the Persians. The laws and polity of Xenophon's Persians, however, are an improved version of the laws and polity of the Spartans. The Persia in which Cyrus was raised was an aristocracy superior to Sparta. The political activity of Cyrus—his extraordinary success—consisted in transforming a stable and healthy aristocracy into an unstable "Oriental despotism" whose rottenness showed itself at the latest immediately after his death. The first step in this transformation was a speech which Cyrus addressed to the Persian nobles and in which he convinced them that they ought to deviate from the habit of their ancestors by practicing virtue no longer for its own sake, but for the sake of its rewards. The destruction of

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aristocracy begins, as one would expect, with corruption of its principle. (*Cyropaedia* 1.5.5–14; compare Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1248 b 38ff., where the view of virtue which Xenophon's Cyrus instills into the minds of the Persian gentlemen is described as the Spartan view.) The quick success of Cyrus's first action forces the reader to wonder whether the Persian aristocracy was a genuine aristocracy, or, more precisely, whether the gentleman in the political or social sense is a true gentleman. This question is identical with the question which Plato answers explicitly in the negative in his story of Er. Socrates says outright that a man who has lived in his former life in a well-ordered regime, participating in virtue by habit and without philosophy, will choose for his next life "the greatest tyranny," for "mostly people make their choice according to the habits of their former life" (*Republic* 619 b 6-620 a 3). There is no adequate solution to the problem of virtue or happiness on the political or social plane. Still, while aristocracy is always on the verge of declining into oligarchy or something worse, it is the best possible political solution of the human problem. It must here suffice to note that Cyrus's second step is the democratization of the army, and that the end of the process is a regime that might seem barely distinguishable from the least intolerable form of tyranny. But one must not overlook the essential difference between Cyrus's rule and tyranny, a distinction that is never obliterated. Cyrus is and remains a legitimate ruler. He is born as a legitimate heir to the reigning king, a scion of an old royal house. He becomes the king of other nations through inheritance or marriage and through just conquest, for he enlarges the boundaries of Persia in the Roman manner: by defending the allies of Persia. The difference between Cyrus and a Hiero educated by Simonides is comparable to the difference between William III and Oliver Cromwell. A cursory comparison of the history of England with the history of certain other European nations suffices to show that this difference is not unimportant to the well-being of peoples. Xenophon did not even attempt to obliterate the distinction between the best tyrant and the king, because he appreciated too well the charms, nay, the blessings, of legitimacy. He expressed this appreciation by subscribing to the maxim (which must be reasonably understood and applied) that the just is identical with the legal.

Voegelin might reply that what is decisive is not Xenophon's conscious intention, stated or implied, but the historical meaning of his work, the historical meaning of a work being determined by the historical situation as distinguished from the conscious intention of the author. Yet opposing the historical meaning of Xenophon's work to his conscious intention implies

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that we are better judges of the situation in which Xenophon thought than Xenophon himself was. But we cannot be better judges of that situation if we do not have a clearer grasp than he had of the principles in whose light historical situations reveal their meaning. After the experience of our generation, the burden of proof would seem to rest on those who assert rather than on those who deny that we have progressed beyond the classics. And even if it were true that we could understand the classics better than they understood themselves, we would become certain of our superiority only after understanding them exactly as they understood themselves. Otherwise we might mistake our superiority to our notion of the classics for superiority to the classics.

According to Voegelin, it was Machiavelli, as distinguished from the classics, who "achieved the theoretical creation of a concept of rulership in the post-constitutional situation," and this achievement was due to the influence on Machiavelli of the biblical tradition. He refers especially to Machiavelli's remark about the "armed prophets" (*Prince* VI). The difficulty to which Voegelin's contention is exposed is indicated by these two facts: he speaks on the one hand of "the apocalyptic [hence thoroughly nonclassical] aspects of the 'armed prophet' in the *Prince*," whereas on the other hand he says that Machiavelli claimed "for [the] paternity" of the "armed prophet" "besides Romulus, Moses, and Theseus, precisely the Xenophontic Cyrus." This amounts to an admission that certainly Machiavelli himself was not aware of any nonclassical implication of his notion of "armed prophets." There is nothing unclassical about Romulus, Theseus, and Xenophon's Cyrus. It is true that Machiavelli adds Moses; but, after having made his bow to the biblical interpretation of Moses, he speaks of Moses in exactly the same manner in which every classical political philosopher would have spoken of him; Moses was one of the greatest legislators or founders (*fondatori*: *Discorsi* I.9) who ever lived. When reading Voegelin's statement on this subject, one receives the impression that in speaking of armed prophets, Machiavelli put the emphasis on "prophets" as distinguished from nonprophetic rulers like Cyrus, for example. But Machiavelli puts the emphasis not on "prophets," but on "armed." He opposes the armed prophets, among whom he counts Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus, as well as Moses, to unarmed prophets like Savonarola. He states the lesson which he intends to convey with remarkable candor: "all armed prophets succeed and the unarmed ones come to ruin." It is difficult to believe that in writing this sentence Machiavelli should have been completely oblivious of the most famous of all unarmed prophets. One certainly cannot understand Machiavelli's remark on the "unarmed proph-

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ets" without taking into consideration what he says about the "unarmed heaven" and "the effeminacy of the world" which, according to him, are due to Christianity (*Discorsi* II.2 and III.1). The tradition which Machiavelli continues, while radically modifying it, is not, as Voegelin suggests, that represented by Joachim of Floris, for example, but the one which we still call, with pardonable ignorance, the Averroistic tradition. Machiavelli declares that Savonarola, that unarmed prophet, was right in saying that the ruin of Italy was caused by "our sins," "but our sins were not what he believed they were," namely, religious sins, "but those which I have narrated," namely, political or military sins (*Prince* XII). In the same vein Maimonides declares that the ruin of the Jewish kingdom was caused by the "sins of our fathers," namely, by their idolatry; but idolatry worked its effect in a perfectly natural manner: it led to astrology and thus induced the Jewish people to devote themselves to astrology instead of to the practice of the arts of war and the conquest of countries. But apart from all this, Voegelin does not give any indication of what the armed prophets have to do with "the post-constitutional situation." Certainly Romulus, Theseus, and Moses were "pre-constitutional" rulers. Voegelin also refers to "Machiavelli's complete drawing of the savior prince in the *Vita di Castruccio Castracani*" which, he says, "is hardly thinkable without the standardized model of the *Life of Timur*." Apart from the fact that Voegelin has failed to show any connection between the *Castruccio* and the *Life of Timur* and between the *Life of Timur* and the biblical tradition, the *Castruccio* is perhaps the most impressive document of Machiavelli's longing for classical *virtù* as distinguished from, and opposed to, biblical righteousness. Castruccio, that idealized condottiere who preferred in so single-minded a manner the life of the soldier to the life of the priest, is compared by Machiavelli himself to Philip of Macedon and to Scipio of Rome.

Machiavelli's longing for classical *virtù* is only the reverse side of his rejection of classical political philosophy. He rejects classical political philosophy because of its orientation by the perfection of the nature of man. The abandonment of the contemplative ideal leads to a radical change in the character of wisdom: Machiavellian wisdom has no necessary connection with moderation. Machiavelli separates wisdom from moderation. The ultimate reason why the *Hiero* comes so close to the *Prince* is that in the *Hiero* Xenophon experiments with a type of wisdom which comes relatively close to a wisdom divorced from moderation: Simonides seems to have an inordinate desire for the pleasures of the table. It is impossible to say how far the epoch-making change that was effected by Machiavelli is

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due to the indirect influence of the biblical tradition, before that change has been fully understood in itself.

The peculiar character of the *Hiero* does not disclose itself to cursory reading. It will not disclose itself to the tenth reading, however painstaking, if the reading is not productive of a change of orientation. This change was much easier to achieve for the eighteenth-century reader than for the reader in our century who has been brought up on the brutal and sentimental literature of the last five generations. We are in need of a second education in order to accustom our eyes to the noble reserve and the quiet grandeur of the classics. Xenophon,as it were, limited himself to cultivating exclusively that character of classical writing which is wholly foreign to the modern reader. No wonder that he is today despised or ignored. An unknown ancient critic, who must have been a man of uncommon discernment, called him most bashful. Those modern readers who are so fortunate as to have a natural preference for Jane Austen rather than for Dostoievski, in particular, have an easier access to Xenophon than others might have; to understand Xenophon, they have only to combine the love of philosophy with their natural preference. In the words of Xenophon, "it is both noble and just, and pious and more pleasant to remember the good things rather than the bad ones." In the *Hiero*, Xenophon experimented with the pleasure that comes from remembering bad things, with a pleasure that admittedly is of doubtful morality and piety.

Letter 21

3202 Oxford Ave., New York 63
21.1.49

Dear Mr. Voegelin,

I received your very amiable letter and sympathetic review, just in the middle of decamping and departing. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to you. At this point, it interests me merely if there is at least one person who knows these ideas from a reading of the publication and not only from statements by word of mouth and who brings, against these ideas, understanding and a certain sympathy. I was already quite prepared to be hushed up or to be decried as not being a "liberal." In response to your pertinent critique, I cannot say anything, without more careful consideration than is at the moment possible.

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Your critique could be interpreted as a supplement to my publication: I do not deny, but rather assume, that there is a fundamental difference between Machiavelli and Xenophon. You sketch out the way this difference should be understood *in concreto*. But you are right: my unexplained thoughts on this issue move in another direction from yours. Maybe I will argue this out with you in print.[49]

Letter 22

March 12, 1949

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Many thanks for your article on "Political Philosophy and History."[50] It is a very fine, clean work; I have the impression that we are in very much greater agreement in the direction of our work than I first supposed. Your main thesis—based on Hegel—that historical reflection is a peculiar requirement of modern philosophy seems completely right to me; and I view this motive also as the *raison d'etre* of my own historical studies. As I have only engaged myself with these questions in English, allow me my English formulation of the problem: To restore the experiences that have led to the creation of certain concepts and symbols; or: Symbols have become opaque; they must be made luminous again by penetrating to the experiences they express.—Very fine too is your critique of the attitude that would understand the thinker better than he would himself; and your insistence that the purpose of historical analysis is the production of meaning, as it was intended by the author.

I assume that this article is a type of advance notice of work, in which

49. In 1954 a French version of *On Tyranny* was published, *De le Tyrannie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954). It contained a long review by Alexandre Kojève, "Tyrannie et sagesse," first published as "L'Action politique des philosophes," *Critique* 41–42 (1950): 46–55, 138–55; Strauss added a "mise au point" that responded briefly to Voegelin and at greater length to Kojève. The French reply by Strauss was in turn republished in English as "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*," in *What Is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959), 95–133. The entire Strauss-Kojève debate has recently been reedited by Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth, *On Tyranny* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

50. Strauss, "Political Philosophy and History," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 10 (1949): 30–50.

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you set out the problem; and I am already very curious to see the further studies.

With warmest greetings,

Eric Voegelin

Letter 23

17.3.49

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

I wanted to thank you warmly for your friendly and encouraging lines. It is very fine that you maintain the customs descended from another world, the Old World. Even more pleasing to me is the agreement in our intentions expressed by you, that so long as we have to combat the presently reigning idiocy, [that shared objective] is of greater significance than the differences, which I also would not wish to deny. Insofar as so slow a writer as I could take up something like this, I plan to say something, after its appearance, about your three-volume work, about which I have heard much: in case this occurs, I will specify in detail my standpoint as opposed to yours.

Your surmise regarding my article "Political Philosophy and History" is right: the article is to be thought of as one of the introductory chapters of a publication on classic principles of politics. But heaven only knows if I will manage with this publication: on the decisive questions, there are no preliminary studies, so that one would have to first lay the groundwork through a series of specialized investigations. At the moment I am studying Lucretius.[51] I have the desire to write freely and frankly on the meaning of his poem, that is, without footnotes, assuming that there is some prospect of publishing an essay of this sort. As far as Lucretius is concerned, the classical philologists are again remarkably blind.

With best wishes,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

51. Strauss later published "A Note on Lucretius," in *Natur und Geschichte: Karl Löwith zum 70. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1967), 322–32, and an expanded version, "Notes on Lucretius," in Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 76–139.

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Letter 24

March 22, 1949

Dear Mr. Strauss,

The way you fling your productions out—a fact that contradicts the claim in your friendly lines that you are a slow writer. Many thanks for the Spinoza study.[52] It came just at the right time—as, it seems, does everything that comes from you—in that I frequently consider the esoteric in Spinoza and the question of what he could actually mean. And so often an incidental comment was very illuminating for me: from some of your citations emerges the insight that Spinoza saw Christianity very precisely as a Lutheran-Calvinist might. Quite evidently he understands the problem of justification in the sense of the *sola fide* principle; whereas the Thomist problem of *amicitia* in faith is evidently unknown to him. Now I also understand better how Spinoza comes to his own religious attitude of *acquiescentia*, an attitude to which one can come from Lutheranism but hardly from classical Catholicism. This appears to me to be not insignificant for an understanding of Spinoza.

What you write about the plan for Lucretius fills me with mixed feelings. If you are only planning to write on Lucretius, this would certainly be welcome; if, however, this plan might become a prestudy to a systematic text of politics, and precisely through this a reason for its delay, it would be a shame. Lucretius is fine, but I would prefer your systematic politics. My encounters with Lucretius are unfortunately only occasional. I never really studied him, but rather always sniffed around at his work, in particular with regard to Santayana and Valéry; this little, however, lets me regret not knowing more. With Santayana and Valéry I have the impression that their Lucretianism is caused by what I would call spiritual fatigue. The inclination to let oneself drop into a depersonalized nature arises from a pseudo-aesthetic weakness of spirit, in particular in Valéry's moving *Cimetière Marin*. I was never quite clear if Lucretius's materialism might have itself a similar cause in the author's personality. I am anxious to hear something from you about it.

With warmest greetings,

Eric Voegelin

52. Strauss, "How to Study Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 17 (1948): 69–131. Reprinted in Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952).

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Letter 25

April 15, 1949

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

Your letter of March 22 remained unanswered for so long because in the meantime my first quarter in Chicago began and I was rather preoccupied with it. Yesterday I received a copy of the *Review of Politics* with your review of my work.[53] It pleased me greatly to see that it was printed *in toto* after all. Your review, with a single exception, will be and remain the only one that contributes to the discussion. The exception is a review promised by Alexander Kojève (the author of *Introduction à l'étude de Hegel*, an exceptional work [Gallimard, 1947])[54] in the journal *Critique*.[55] Kojève depicts himself as a Stalinist, but would be immediately shot in the USSR. As soon as Kojève's review appears, I intend to write a critique of both of your critiques. Gurian, who visited me two days ago, will leave me space in the *Review of Politics*.[56] Because I would like to do this, I will save my ammunition. I am doing this also since I want to think over your objections.

Regarding Spinoza, I attempted in my German work on Spinoza (1930) to define more exactly the connection with Calvinism (with Luther, in my opinion, there is no connection at all).[57] I believe now, that then I fell too much into the trap of Spinoza's accommodations. His intertheological preferences are essentially of a tactical nature except for the general one, that he prefers theological rationalism *qua* rationalism over every fideism. For me personally, the most important thing in the essay that you have read is that I succeeded in interpreting "*ad captum vulgi*" authentically. "Sometime" I will point out the coherence of Spinoza's moral philosophy: it is perhaps the most interesting example of an ethics based on modern natural science (in the sense of a modernity "more advanced" than the Hobbesian one).

53. See Letter 20.

54. Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, ed. R. Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1947); trans. James H. Nichols, ed. A. Bloom, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

55. See Letter 21, note.

56. Strauss's reply was not published in the *Review of Politics*; see Letter 21, note.

57. Strauss, *Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaft: Untersuchungen zu Spinozas theologisch-Politischem Traktat* (Berlin: Akadamie Verlag, 1930); trans. E. M. Sinclair, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken, 1965).

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Unfortunately, because the semester began, I had to leave Lucretius to one side in order to turn to the Lucretian-grounded Rousseau, the *Discours sur l'origine d'Inégalité*. I hope that this time I will cope with this political writing of J. J. and can in the fall submit an essay about it (a continuation of the essay in *Social Research*).[58] This work contains in germ all that comes later (for example Kant, Marx . . .). I do not yet know if it will be possible for me to point out everything that is in it.

I want to say only this about Lucretius today: his poem is the purest and most glorious expression of the attitude that elicits consolation from the utterly hopeless truth, on the basis of its being only the truth—there is no idea of the use of the hopeless, godless truth for some social purpose, as is almost always the case with other fashions or trends; nor is there any aestheticism or sentimentality. I do not believe that people like Santayana or Valéry can understand Lucretius. The next approximation in our world is the scientifically slanted aspect of Nietzsche.—As for Lucretius's "personality"? I do not believe it matters. Nor does his Romanness: his poem tries precisely *to be free from* "Romanness" (among other things): *primum Graius homo*—this means *not* the Romans.

Hope to hear from you soon. With warm wishes,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 26

17.12.49

My Dear Mr. Voegelin,

Warmest thanks for your analysis of the *Gorgias*, which I read with great interest.[59] Your position has become significantly clearer to me, and thus also the point at which I do not quite understand you. We are quite in agreement that in the dialogues *nostra res agitur*, [and] that it is therefore possible in particular to say that Plato's critique of the sophists is a critique of "intellectuals." The question is only whether you first of all interpret in the obvious way *nostra res* and therefore [believe] the reason for the reprehensibleness of the

58. See Letter 16.

59. Voegelin, "The Philosophy of Existence: Plato's *Gorgias*," *The Review of Politics* 11 (1949): 477–98.

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intellectuals is identical to the Platonic one. The employment of the expression "existential" reveals the difficulty. "Existential" is opposed to the "objective," "theoretical," and thus betrays its anti-Platonic origin. The man who has thought through most clearly the problem of "existence"—Heidegger—therefore made Plato especially responsible for the actual "neglect." Kierkegaard's resistance to Socrates—the appeal to Socrates against Hegel is after all only provisional—expresses the same thought. In his critique of Plato, Heidegger tries to find the way by rejecting philosophy and metaphysics *as such. If* one wants to use the Kierkegaardian expression, one has to say that for Socrates-Plato, "existential" and "theoretical" are the same: insofar as I am serious and there are questions, I look for *the* "objective" truth. The sophist is a man to whom the truth does not matter—but in this sense all men except for the *gnēsios philosophounte* are sophists, especially the *polis* as *polis* (and not only the decadent ones). The passion for *knowledge* that moves the Platonic dialogue, this highest *mania*, cannot be understood within Kierkegaard's concept of "existence," and [the attempt to do so] must be discarded as a radical illusion. This *mania*, from which Faust himself turns away, [is] in opposition to the creature in paradise, on the Isles of the Blessed, or to the painstaking searches of Goethe himself.

The question Plato *or* existentialism is today the ontological question—about "intellectuals" we (you and I) do not need to waste words, unless it were about how they finally have to be interpreted, namely, within Platonic or existentialist philosophy; for this reason, I permit myself these brief remarks.

With warmest greetings,

Yours,
Leo Strauss

Letter 27

January 2, 1950

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Many thanks for your letter of 17.XII. I believe I owe you a few lines of explanation.

You are, of course, completely right to become indignant over existentialist philosophy and to ask what got into me. Let me then assure you that the misleading title of the article does not stem from me. I had titled it simply "Plato's Gorgias." Gurian added on "Philosophy of Existence" without asking me; I was embarrassingly surprised when I saw the journal.

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Fortunately there are only a few readers, such as you, who would notice the scandal; and so I let it go. I swear that I am not straying on existentialist paths; we are in agreement also on the question of ontology.

Why and in what sense I use the term "existential" in the text of the article should be explained. Terminologically, the case is easy: I know no better expression; if I find one, I would be gladly prepared to use it; and if you could give me ideas I would be very grateful. It has to do then with the problem itself. I use the term "existential" in a sense that is very similar to that of Maritain in his *Court traité de l'existence*, which I just bought in New York and read in part on the trip.[60] The truth of ontology (including in particular philosophical anthropology) is not a datum that can be recognized by anyone at any time. Ontological knowledge emerges in the process of history and biographically in the process of the individual person's life under certain conditions of education, social context, personal inclination, and spiritual conditioning. *Epistēmē* is not just a function of understanding, it is also in the Aristotelian sense, a dianoetic *aretē*. For this *non*cognitive aspect of *epistēmē* I use the term "existential."

In a history of ideas I must use this term quite often. A history of ideas should not be a doxographic report, or a history of dogmas in the classical sense, but rather a history of existential transformations in which the "truth" comes to sight, is obscured, is lost, and is again recovered. A history of political ideas, in particular, should investigate the process in which "truth" becomes socially effective or is hindered in such effectiveness. You see, it does not have to do with a negation or relativization of ontology, but rather with the correlation between perception in the cognitive and existential sense; this correlation is for me the theme of "history." Existential special themes would be: theogony, the history of myth and revelation; destruction of the knowledge of truth through the *pleonexia* of intellectuals; the effectiveness of authority through existential readiness to reproduce the known truth imaginatively; the destruction of authority through the enclosing passion of self-assertion, etc.

These suggestions are brief; but they show what is at stake. I find, as said, no better term than "existential"; but I am at all times ready for a reform in terminology, if I find a better one.

With all best wishes for New Year,

Eric Voegelin

60. Jacques Maritain, *Court traité de l'existence et de l'existant*, trans. L. Galantière and G. B. Phélan as *Existence and the Existent*, new ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1964).

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Letter 28

14.3.50

My Dear Mr. Voegelin,

Please excuse my long silence, but since I received your letter of January 2 I have been in such a whirl.

We are arguing as to whether, if one rejects existentialist philosophy, one can employ the expression "existential" without creating confusion. You admit the difficulty, but see no alternative. What is the problem? There are truths, you say, that cannot be seen by everyone at all times, the recognition of which therefore is bound to certain extratheoretical presuppositions, and thus are "existentially" conditioned. Therein lies an ambivalence: even Aristotle would have admitted that his conception of the whole was not factually possible at all times—it required leisure, that is to say, free communities within which there was the possibility for the unfolding of a higher humanity, and especially it required the continuity of a series of thinkers dedicated to the search for the truth of the whole. But: here "history" is no more than *condition* for the recognition of truth—"history" is not the source of truth. You say: the history of ideas is the "history of the existential transformations in which the 'truth' comes to view, is obscured, is lost, and then again won." Why do you place "truth" in quotation marks? Is truth only so-called truth, the illusion of the respective period? Or if there is *the* truth, which indeed under unfavorable circumstances, or deliberately, is obscured and then also not again won, this truth is itself and principally not "existentially" conditioned.

The concept "existential" requires a radical critique of the *vita contemplativa*, such that at the base of this critique one can only reject, but not understand, Plato. To my mind it will not do to identify Plato's critique of sophistry as a topic with the existentialist critique of *theoria*: the sophists (= intellectuals) were quite clearly not theoretical characters. Indeed, the *vita contemplativa* requires a turning around of the whole soul, but that does not mean that one can understand the *vita contemplativa* adequately in respect of its effects on the (if you forgive the expression) nontheoretical part of the soul.

The closest classical equivalent of "existential" is "practical," insofar as one understands "practical" in contradistinction to "theoretical." Existentialist philosophy will perhaps appear at some time in the future as the paradoxical effort to lead the thought of the praxis of the practical to its, in my mind, absurd last consequences. Under these conditions praxis ceases indeed to be

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actually praxis and transforms itself into "existence." If I am not totally mistaken, the root of all modern darkness from the seventeenth century on is the obscuring of the difference between theory and praxis, an obscuring that first leads to a reduction of praxis to theory (this is the meaning of so-called rationalism) and then, in retaliation, to the rejection of theory in the name of a praxis that is no longer intelligible as praxis.

In short, I do not believe that one can succeed with the terminology today at one's disposal (as the classic terminology is for the present completely unintelligible). That this is no mere "semantic" problem, I hardly need to say to you.

I warmly reciprocate your wishes for the New Year—please accept them despite the terrible delay.

Cordially yours,
Leo Strauss

Letter 29

10.4.50

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

You have misunderstood me, as you could not decipher my disgraceful handwriting.[61] I spoke not of "extrahuman" but rather of "extratheoretical" *presupposition*. The question is whether there is a pure grasp of truth as an *essential human possibility*, quite regardless of what the conditions and *actualization* of this possibility are, or whether there is *not* such a grasp as an essential possibility. When you say "only at such and such a time did that order of the soul emerge," you leave open the question whether this order of the soul is the natural telos of Man or a "coincidence"; that it also *could not* have emerged, does that not deprive it of the status of a telos? However that may be, it seems to me, nonetheless, that we are in more fundamental agreement than I believed.

May I ask you to let me know sometime what you think of Mr. Popper.[62] He gave a lecture here, on the task of social philosophy, that was beneath

61. Letter missing (Voegelin to Strauss).

62. Karl Popper, author of *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) and several other works of an analytical nature.

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contempt: it was the most washed-out, lifeless positivism trying to whistle in the dark, linked to a complete inability to think "rationally," although it passed itself off as "rationalism"—it was very bad. I cannot imagine that such a man ever wrote something that was worthwhile reading, and yet it appears to be a professional duty to become familiar with his productions. Could you say something to me about that—if you wish, I will keep it to myself.

Warmest greetings,

Leo Strauss

Letter 30

April 18, 1950

Dear Mr. Strauss,

The opportunity to speak a few deeply felt words about Karl Popper to a kindred soul is too golden to endure a long delay. This Popper has been for years, not exactly a stone against which one stumbles, but a troublesome pebble that I must continually nudge from the path, in that he is constantly pushed upon me by people who insist that his work on the "open society and its enemies" is one of the social science masterpieces of our times. This insistence persuaded me to read the work even though I would otherwise not have touched it. You are quite right to say that it is a vocational duty to make ourselves familiar with the ideas of such a work when they lie in our field; I would hold out against this duty the other vocational duty, not to write and to publish such a work. In that Popper violated this elementary vocational duty and stole several hours of my lifetime, which I devoted in fulfilling my vocational duty, I feel completely justified in saying without reservation that this book is impudent, dilettantish crap. Every single sentence is a scandal, but it is still possible to lift out a few main annoyances.

1. The expressions "closed [society]" and "open society" are taken from Bergson's *Deux Sources*.[63] Without explaining the difficulties that induced

63. Henri Bergson, *Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion*, trans. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Bereton as *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1935).

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Bergson to create these concepts, Popper takes the terms because they sound good to him; [he] comments in passing that in Bergson they had a "religious" meaning, but that he will use the concept of the open society closer to Graham Wallas's "great society" or to that of Walter Lippmann. Perhaps I am oversensitive about such things, but I do not believe that respectable philosophers such as Bergson develop their concepts for the sole purpose that the coffeehouse scum might have something to botch. There also arises the relevant problem: if Bergson's theory of open society is philosophically and historically tenable (which I in fact believe), then Popper's idea of the open society is ideological rubbish. For this reason alone, he should have discussed the problem with all possible care.

2. The impertinent disregard for the achievements in his particular problem area, which makes itself evident with respect to Bergson, runs through the whole work. When one reads the deliberations on Plato or Hegel, one has the impression that Popper is quite unfamiliar with the literature on the subject—even though he occasionally cites an author. In some cases, as for example Hegel, I would believe that he has never seen a work like Rosenzweig's *Hegel and the State*.[64] In other cases, where he cites works without appearing to have perceived their contents, another factor is added:

3. Popper is philosophically so uncultured, so fully a primitive ideological brawler, that he is not able even approximately to reproduce correctly the contents of one page of Plato. Reading is of no use to him; he is too lacking in knowledge to understand what the author says. Through this emerge terrible things, as when he translates Hegel's "Germanic world" as "German world" and draws conclusions from this mistranslation regarding Hegel's German nationalist propaganda.

4. Popper engages in no textual analysis from which can be seen the author's intention; instead he carries the modern ideological clichés directly to the text, assuming that the text will deliver results in the sense of the clichés. It will be a special pleasure for you to hear that, for example, Plato experienced an evolution—from an early "humanitarian" period still recognizable in the *Gorgias*, to something else (I can't recall any more if "reactionary" or "authoritarian") in the *Republic*.

Briefly and in sum: Popper's book is a scandal without extenuating

64. Rosenzweig, *Hegel und der Staat* (Berlin: Oldenburg, 1920).

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circumstances; in its intellectual attitude it is the typical product of a failed intellectual; spiritually one would have to use expressions like rascally, impertinent, loutish; in terms of technical competence, as a piece in the history of thought, it is dilettantish, and as a result is worthless.

It would not be suitable to show this letter to the unqualified. Where it concerns its factual contents, I would see it as a violation of the vocational duty you identified, to support this scandal through silence.

Eric Voegelin

Letter 31

8.8.50

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

I have never thanked you for your interesting letter dated 18.4. In confidence I would like to tell you that I showed your letter to my friend Kurt Riezler,[65] who was thereby encouraged to throw his not inconsiderable influence into the balance against Popper's probable appointment here. You thereby helped to prevent a scandal.

Today I write to you for the following reason. At the beginning of 1951, at Gallimard's wish, a French translation of my *Hiero* book is to appear in the following form:[66] 1) French translation of the *Hiero*; 2) my text omitting nearly all notes; 3) a sixty-page long critique of my writing titled "La tyrannie et la sagesse," written by Alexander Kojève, author of *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*,[67] which is in every detail an outstanding interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*; 4) a "Restatement" from me, which I am just now writing. It seems important to me to begin the discussion with a response to your review. Because the critique of your views forms an integral part of the whole "Restatement," I am not sticking strictly to what you expressly said: I must come to terms with your unstated premises, which in part I know from your other publications, and in part presume. It occurred to me that you might wish to riposte. Unfortunately

65. See Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959), ch. 10.

66. See above, Letters 21, 25.

67. See above, Letter 25.

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this is not possible in the French publication. But perhaps one could persuade Gurian to print the English original of my afterword together with your riposte in the *Review of Politics*, after the French publication has appeared. Please let me know what you think of this idea.[68]

Warmest greetings,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 32

August 21, 1950

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Many thanks for your letter of August 8. I returned only yesterday from a lengthy trip—as explanation as to why I answer your queries only today.

Let me say above all how much it pleases me that your *Hiero* found attention in France—one of the few good things that has been written today has not become lost. If I have understood your letter properly (I still have occasionally a little difficulty deciphering your handwriting—but it becomes better with every letter I receive from you)—if I understand you properly, then, you will add a "Restatement" to the French edition, in which I might at last clearly find out what the unstated presuppositions of my work are. Do not take this sentence, please, as ironic—I am very concerned myself at the moment with further explications on precisely these presuppositions, and I really hope for some help from your response. Thus far I am then very satisfied with your proposal. With regard to the further possibility of publishing your "Restatement" in English, accompanied by some of my remarks in the *Review of Politics*, you will find me, with the greatest pleasure, willing—if Gurian is interested.

Since the French edition will appear at the beginning of 1951, and the English publication will only take place later, we will have the opportunity to discuss at length these and other things, when I come to Chicago at the

68. This proposal by Strauss was not acted upon by Gurian.

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end of January (to the Walgreen Lectures).[69] I am already looking forward to the opportunity of seeing you at some length.

Enclosed, a study on Marx;[70] one or another point may interest you.

Yours,

Eric Voegelin

Letter 33

25.8.50

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

Warmest thanks for your Marx essay, which I read with the greatest interest and with hearty agreement. In particular I am in total agreement with what you say regarding "Interpreting the world or changing it": that is, in fact, the root of the evil.[71] You are also completely right when you note the necessity of the *positive* image of the man of the future—this travesty as *homo universalis*, every oaf a Ph.D. I have doubt only with reference to p. 386: "M. was perfectly aware of the connection between his own thought and Genevan Protestantism." He believed in this connection, as did Hegel himself. But is it not, as you yourself subsequently seem to hint, an illusion? Is *liberal* Protestantism not a pseudo-Protestantism, whose real basis is not Protestantism, but rather a rational secularization? A small matter—top of 282, referring to note 18—compare Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, part 1, 5th paragraph.

My terrible handwriting must have brought about a terrible misunderstanding. How could you ever believe that I wrote that you will learn finally with clarity from my "Restatement" what the unstated premises of your work are? From this response you will merely see that I take the classical teaching on tyranny as in principle completely sufficient. The longer section, which comes to terms with Kojève's tract "La tyrannie et la sagesse," deals, admittedly, with general matters and will, I believe, make

69. Published by Voegelin as *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

70. Voegelin, "The Formation of the Marxian Revolutionary Idea," *Review of Politics* 12 (1950): 275–302.

71. The reference is to Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach," number eleven.

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my premises clearer to you. They are very simple: *philosophari necesse est*, and philosophy is radically independent of faith—the root of *our* disagreement lies presumably in the second thesis.

I am *very* pleased that there is an opportunity to see you here in January. Here there reigns such atomization that I learned only from your letter that you are giving the Walgreen Lectures in the winter term.

With regard to the publication of the English original of my epilogue, now a new problem has arisen, insofar as the epilogue promises to run to forty printed pages. Gurian will probably not go along with it, and I must try to persuade Alvin Johnson that he too sometimes may also print a ruthless, reactionary utterance. I will keep you up to date.

With warm wishes

Yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 34

December 4, 1950

Dear Mr. Strauss,

I have not yet responded to your friendly letter of August 25; and now your offprint on "Natural Right" has arrived.[72]

Let me at first thank you for the offprint. It really is an excellent analysis of historicism, with which I fully agree; and I am only eager to read what follows. I see that it is part of your Walgreen Lectures from last year—why has the book not yet appeared?[73] Or did it only pass me by? You suggest that in a further development you will provide a foundation for natural-law theory on the basis of classical political philosophy. And I would also like to know what the public in Chicago said of this effort; are there discussions after the lectures? And now to a point in your study that at the moment preoccupies me greatly. You say, on p. 425: "In the present state of our knowledge, it is difficult to say at what point in the modern development

72. Strauss, "Natural Right and the Historical Approach," *Review of Politics* 12 (1950): 422–42.

73. Published by Strauss as *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1953).

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the decisive break occurred with the 'unhistorical' approach that prevailed in all earlier philosophy." I must grant you that our "present state of knowledge" is not the best, but I like to believe that one can say something about the origin of the movement of ideas that comes to a head in historicism. It seems to me, the origin lies in the gnosticism of the Middle Ages and the attempt to give a "meaning" to the immanent course of history, as for example in the works of Joachim of Flora. When the attempt is made, first merely in principle, to immanentize the transcendent *eschaton* (in the Christian sense of the term), then everything follows from the logic of the approach, right down to the historical fact as the answer to the meaning of self-interpreting existence. From the approach of the Middle Ages, the modern inclination seems to follow in seeing something else in history besides political, profane history. From this point of view, I would permit myself a correction to your formulation, that "*all* earlier philosophy" was unhistorical. Philosophy [deformed into] the system, from Descartes to Hegel, seems to me to form a unity, insofar as the idea of a philosophical, closed "system" dominates. However, the idea of "system," of the possible exhaustive penetration of the mystery of the cosmos and its existence by the intellect, is itself a Gnostic phenomenon, a drawing in of eternity into the time of the individual thinker. I would therefore restrict your comment on philosophy in the Platonic-Aristotelian sense (Aristotle, as far as I know, had no concept of system; the systematization of Aristotle comes from the commentators).—This brings me to a comment in your letter regarding the derivation of Marx from liberal Protestantism. You mean that liberal Protestantism already should no longer be spoken of as Protestantism, but instead be seen as a result of secularization. I would agree with that, insofar as secularization in the sense of a radical immanentization must be distinguished from the half-baked immanentization of the Middle Ages and the Reformation. If we follow the logic of the problem (that is, immanentization) to its beginning, then I would see in orthodox Protestantism already the start of immanentization. Calvin flirts with the problem in the *Institutes*, where his concern for the *certitudo salutis* through the unequivocal "call" is quite clearly a Gnostic attempt to gain certitude of salvation, which is a bit more certain than orthodox *cognitio fidei*. Luther vacillates, but his hatred of the *fides caritate formata*, his wild efforts to take love out of faith, and to make deliberate knowledge into its substance, seems to me to lead in the same direction. One would perhaps have to say that there was enough Catholic substance in "orthodox" Protestantism to

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arrest a further development, the inner logic of which forces itself through in liberal Protestantism.

With regard to the "second thesis" of your letter, that philosophy is radically independent of faith, we will discuss that in Chicago. At the moment, I do not see how you get around the historical fact of the beginning of philosophy in the attitude of faith of Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides.

The reason for my rather long silence is my work on the Walgreen Lectures. Naturally, it became something else than I had first anticipated. The title will read "Truth and Representation"; and the problem of modern gnosticism will take up a large part of it.

Yours,

Eric Voegelin

Letter 35

10.12.50

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

Just back from a trip to the east, I find your letter of the fourth of this month. I have just a bit of time, but unfortunately no proper paper. Excuse me.

My Walgreen Lectures have not yet appeared, because they are not yet ready to print. I have a bad conscience, but I would have even a worse one if I had already published them. The work remains a risk in either case, even though I do nothing more than present the *problem* of natural right as an unsolved problem. As to the reaction of the public here in Chicago, it was, I believe, favorable, especially among the younger ones, who at first see only an alternative between positivism-relativism-pragmatism and Neo-Thomism, and who can scarcely imagine that one can draw the consequence from one's ignorance that one must strive after knowledge, and that they see this immediately when one demonstrates it to them. There are *no* discussions after the Walgreen Lectures.

To your objections to the passage on page 425 of my article, I would say that of course I know of the idea of tracing back the turn to history to Joachim of Flora and the like (alone in the last two years the books of

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Taubes and Löwith appeared, who do just this)[74] but also that it does not persuade me. I will not raise the objection that one would have to return from Joachim to the Islamic Shi'ah,[75] which for its part has a connection with Plato's *Statesman*, and so the clear lines and the clarity of the context fade away. Even if the lines from Joachim to Hegel exist, they would not bring out the turn to the thoroughly "this-worldly" philosophy, that is, from the eternal to a this-worldly process: one has to bring out as well the turn within philosophy. In this one must above all, as I see it, assume that "*all* earlier philosophy" was "ahistorical." "Ahistorical" is not the same as "systematic." Classical philosophy was not "systematic," but at the same time it was "ahistorical." "System" means the derivation of the whole sum of realities out of the *prōton physei*—it presumes that we can begin with the *prōton physei*, that the thinker stands at the beginning. Classical philosophy understands itself as the uncompletable ascent from *proteron pros hēmas* to *proteron physei*. Expressed otherwise: the "system" requires that the *hylē* be resolved into intelligible relations or the like, which classical philosophy denies. Classical philosophy is "ahistorical" insofar as it is a search for the *aie ōn*, within which all history has taken or can take place, for the *aie ōn* in no way opens up through "history": history is for classical philosophy infinitely unimportant, insofar as the decisive questions, the fundamental questions, necessarily relate to the *aie ōn*. The fundamental questions—(1) the question of the *archē* or the *archai*, (2) the question of the right life or the *aristē politeia*. "History" in the strict sense belongs in the practical dimension, in the dimension that is subordinated to the theoretical. Historicizing means the forgetting of eternity. This forgetting must be understood in terms of the rejection of the classical concept of philosophy. "*En brûlant les étapes*,"[76] one could say that historicism is a reaction to a system-philosophy, a reaction that has not freed itself from the ultimate presuppositions of system-philosophy—the obscuring of the radical difference between theory and praxis that lies at the basis of both forms of modern thinking. I say that historicism is a reaction to system-philosophy: the

74. Jacob Taubes, *Abendländische Eschatologie* (Bern: Franke, 1947), and Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

75. Shi'ah is the smaller of the two major branches of Islam, as distinct from Sunnah. It began as an essentially political movement in early Islam but subsequently became a religious movement. Shi'is and Sunnis disagree chiefly on readings of the Qur'an and on the character of the imamate, the Shi'i religious leadership.

76. *Brûler une étape* means to pass by a halting-place without stopping; thus, Strauss proceeded directly to the "bottom line" regarding historicism and system-philosophy.

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proto-Hegelian system is at first not "historical," except in an embryonic manner, as I think I said provisionally in chapter 6 of my Hobbes book.[77]

As to my remark on Protestant liberalism, namely that it cannot be understood alone from the religious tradition, I think above all of the overwhelming influence that modern science (critique of the possibility, or rather recognizability, of the miracles; denial of the simple reality of heaven and hell and the like) has had on the *whole* of modern thinking. One should think also of the influence of the discoveries as early as the sixteenth century that belongs by its structure to the influence of modern science. (Do you know my works, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* [1930] and *Philosophy and Law* [1935], in which I tried to set out this connection in a somewhat more open-minded manner than usual?) Everything that I would write in response to your question would only be a misleading abbreviation of these explanations. Unfortunately, I do not have any copies of this book any more.

As to your question, "Philosophy and Faith," I deny that the "historical fact of the beginning of philosophy consists in the attitude of faith of Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides," which you assume. Whatever *noein* might mean, it is certainly not *pistis* in some sense. On this point Heidegger in his *Holzwege* (who otherwise says many *adunatotata*) is simply right.

I am greatly looking forward to our reunion in January. We will not be in "agreement"—but for me it is always a great benefit and a rare joy to speak to a man who chooses the hard way.

With warm wishes,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

PS. Renewed apologies for the paper on which I have written today.

77. Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Genesis*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1936] 1952).

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Letter 36

February 21, 1951

Dear Mr. Strauss,

We have just begun our semester, but now the first assault has somewhat died down; and I hurry to thank you and your dear wife very warmly for your hospitality.

In particular I wish to thank you for the opportunity to read your *Philosophy and Law*. After reading it, your present position is actually more difficult for me to understand than before. I have the impression that you have retreated from an understanding of the prophetic (religious) foundation of philosophizing (with which I would heartily agree) to a theory of *epistēmē*, and that you refuse to see the problem of *epistēmē* in connection with experience, out of which it emerges. Why you do this, I do not know. And how this position can work, when it comes to the treatment of a concrete problem (for example, to an interpretation of a Platonic myth), I cannot predict—for that I would first have to see from you a concrete implementation.

With all best wishes,

Very cordially yours,
Eric Voegelin

Letter 37

25.2.51

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

I now have some time, but no proper paper. I fear when I do have the right paper, I will have no free time. So I dare to write to you on improper paper.

Warmest thanks for your letter. Your own thanks are quite unnecessary: we are very sorry not to see you more often—but these horrid flus, to say nothing of the demands of teaching duties. I could not even attend all your lectures. Therefore I also hesitate to say more than that they were most interesting. There is, as you can imagine, one point where our paths separate. I do not even want to try to describe it more exactly before I have read your lectures more closely. I have the intention to discuss them in detail in print.

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With regard to *Philosophy and Law*, I believe that I basically still stand on the same ground. I hope, of course, that I have deepened my learning in the last fifteen years and would therefore express many things differently.

When I insisted at that time that the law has primacy, that was—leaving aside objective reasons—conditioned by the fact that I spoke of the Middle Ages. But you too would not deny that there is an essential distinction between the thinking of the Middle Ages, based on revelation, and the thinking of classical antiquity, not based on revelation. There is a double reason not to obscure this essential difference in any way. First, it is in the interest of revelation, which is by no means merely natural knowledge. Secondly, for the sake of human knowledge, *epistēmē*. You yourself have said that science matters very much to you. For me, it matters a great deal to understand it as such. Its classics are the Greeks and not the Bible. The classics demonstrated that truly human life is a life dedicated to science, knowledge, and the search for it. Coming from the Bible the *hen anagkaion* is something completely different. No justifiable purpose is served by obscuring this contradiction, by the postulating of the *tertium* from there [i.e., from the classics and the Bible].[78] Every synthesis is actually an option either for Jerusalem or for Athens.

Well, you speak of the religious foundation of classical philosophy. I would not do so simply for the reason that there is no Greek word for "religion." One would have to speak of the gods or of God or of the divine, and one would have to elucidate what different things the philosophers understood by God. But it was probably not the same as what the people understood by it. One would have to elucidate further which *experiences* of the divine the philosophers recognized as genuine. Plato and Aristotle attained, after all, *proof* of the existence of gods not from experience and customs but rather from the analysis of motion.

I believe still today that the *theioi nomoi* is the common ground of the Bible and philosophy—humanly speaking. But I would specify that, in any event, it is the problem of the multitude of *theioi nomoi* that leads to the diametrically opposed solutions of the Bible on the one hand and of philosophy on the other.

You seem to be quite sure that the Platonic myths are intelligible only on the basis of postulating a "religious" experience underlying them. I am not so sure about that. I confess my ignorance. It seems to me impossible really to solve the problem of the Platonic myth before one has solved the

78. Strauss's writing is very difficult to read in this passage.

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problem of the Platonic dialogue, that is to say, the cosmos of the dialogues, since this whole work is a myth. Apart from that, those pieces that are usually designated as *the* myths of Plato are always elements of a dialogue. But as far as I know, so far nobody has been able to say clearly what the meaning of the dialogue is. That does not surprise me. Because without a complete understanding of the whole Platonic corpus, there remains inevitably a last doubt. I know of no one who could claim such an understanding. This much, I believe, emerges throughout from Plato, that he was less anxious to induce the better readers to believe than to induce them to think. And for that there is in fact no better means than the enigmatic quality of his work in general and the myths particularly.

I do not believe that the problem of the dialogues is irresolvable. It only seems to me that we are still quite far from doing so. Since when has the problem actually been noticed? Hardly before Schleiermacher, whose solution is demonstrably false. Then P. Friedländer began again—fundamentally [his interpretation was] only aesthetic. I find here and there good observations, but nowhere a clear exposition that goes to the bottom of things. Nearly the whole research is based on the hypothetical "development" theory, which cuts off all the central problems of interpretation by referring them to various periods of origin.

I do not know if you now understand my position better. Please do not hesitate to call me to account.

With warmest greetings,

Yours,

Leo Strauss

Letter 38

April 22, 1951

Dear Mr. Strauss,

I must thank you for a whole number of things—for your letter of February 25, for the offprints on Hobbes and Max Weber,[79] and for the

79. Strauss, "On the Spirit of Hobbes' Political Philosophy," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 4 (1950): 405–31, and "The Social Science of Max Weber," *Measure* 2 (1951): 204–30.

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